

Valadus Consulting

Presentation: Designated Housing Interviews

September 2014

We conducted 20+ informational interviews to learn more about the housing needs of elderly and NED population

Over the course of 2 months, we conducted a series of phone interviews with the elderly and non-elderly disabled population in the Greater Boston area in order to learn about:

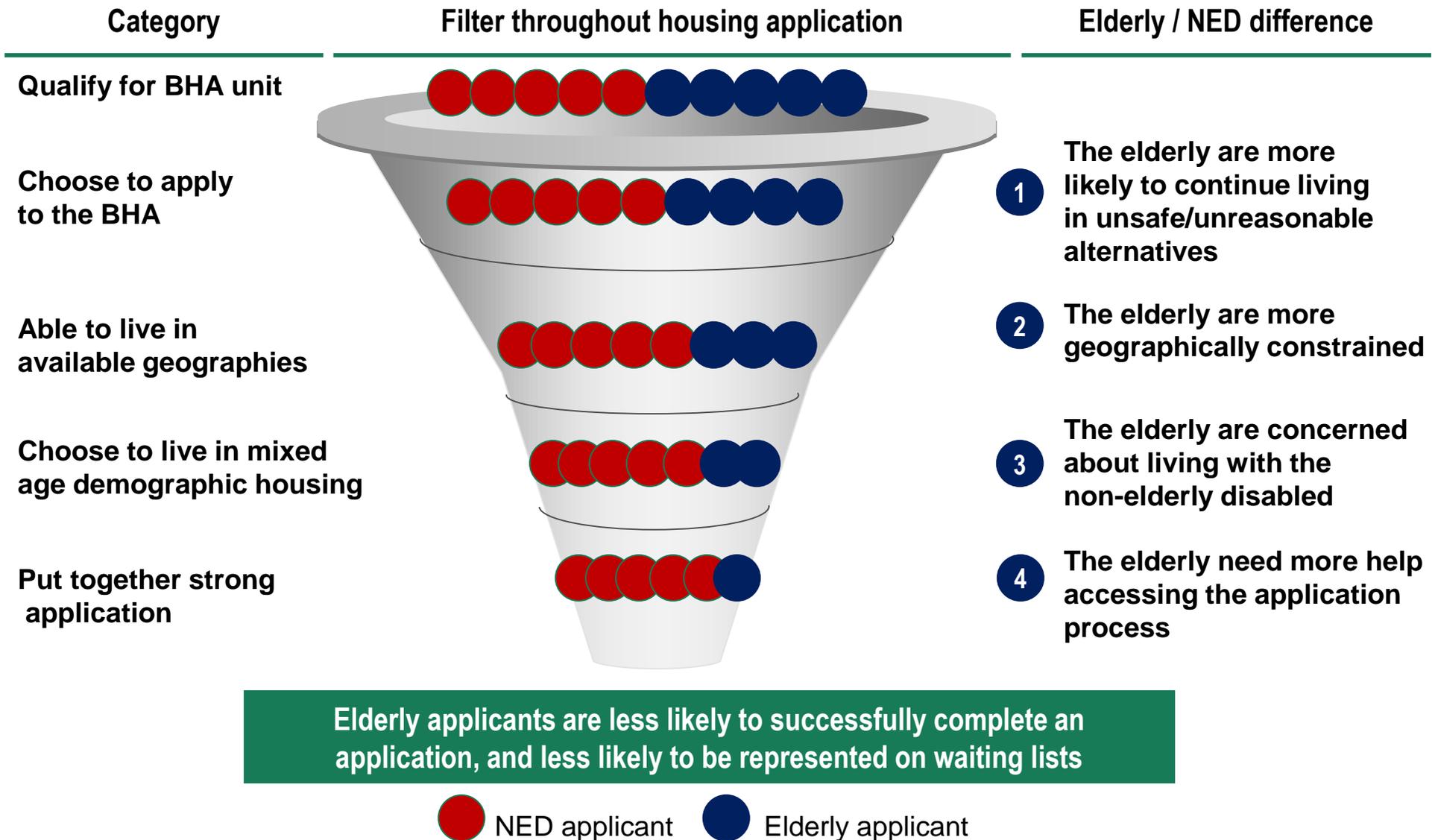
- Specific living preferences and requirements
- The housing search and application process as well as alternative housing options
- The size and needs of each respective population

We conducted over 20 interviews with BHA residents and BHA current/former applicants as well as experts from the following organizations:

- City of Boston's Elderly Commission
- City of Boston's Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Hearth, Inc.
- HomeStart, Inc.
- Boston Medical Center's Elders Living at Home Program (ELAHP)
- Ethos
- Massachusetts Association of Older Americans
- Boston Center for Independent Living

We discovered structural and systematic disadvantages that the elderly face throughout the application process

A number of factors add structural difficulties to the elderly throughout the application process



Seniors often stay in unsafe / unreasonable housing

Comments

Supporting quotes

Many housing alternatives for seniors are not viable

- Seniors will stay in housing that is unsustainably expensive
- Seniors will stay with acquaintances that offer no stability
- Seniors will stay in nursing homes or hospitals

"I stayed with a friend of 20 years, and it was just kind of either I will sleep on the couch or you will sleep on the couch [...] he is a drunk, so it didn't go smoothly."

- **Marian, BHA Elderly Resident**

However, seniors often fail to seek out better housing options

- It is more difficult to get seniors to go through the necessary application steps
- Seniors often "feel hopeless and don't see the point"

"[Seniors say,] 'By the time they get to my name, I will be dead.' It often takes a lot of encouragement for them to apply."

- **Boston area public official for elderly issues**

Elderly options are more limited than NED

- NED can apply within BHA along different paths
 - MassHealth's vouchers are transferable between institutions
 - Family housing
- NED can apply to disabled-specific organizations outside of the BHA

"There are more waitlists that disabled people can apply, meaning that they have more options."

- **Boston area homeless advocate**

Seniors are geographically constrained

Seniors are more attached to their geographic surroundings

Comments

- Many have had a long-standing history with their particular surroundings, often living at a particular location for decades
 - Familiarizing oneself to new locations can be daunting for the elderly
- The elderly often currently live with or nearby to existing family members
- The elderly tend to be slower to mobilize than the NED
 - After being on a waitlist for 2-5 years, they may need to re-evaluate their ability to mobilize

Supporting quotes

"I've recently moved into a new apartment and familiarized myself with the new environment. It was a big hassle for me; even if BHA offered me a better apartment, I wouldn't consider it."

- Lunie, BHA Elderly Applicant

"I felt that I was in danger if I were to live higher than the second floor or in a building far away from my hospital."

- Dulce, elderly applicant who refused unit

"I had no preference for any geographic location. I was going to one hospital before, and was able to continue going there."

- Michael, non-elderly disabled resident

Their geographic constraint limits their housing application

- Location preferences tend to be neighborhood specific
- Those currently living in nursing homes require close coordination to successfully move out

"Many elderly residents have to plan for the service planning of moving to a new location. You can't just call them up one day and move them."

- Boston area elderly advocate

Seniors have concerns about living with NED

Comments

The elderly and NED have basic differences in personal safety and lifestyle preferences

- BHA's housing policy of mixing the elderly and NED populations have resulted in many complaints regarding substance abuse and mental illness
- Elderly individuals have expressed a stronger concern for safety than the NED and tend to associate the younger population with drugs and crime
- Some conflicts are not population specific, but instead specific personal issues, such as noise level and rowdiness

These concerns cause seniors to not submit applications

- The elderly are frightened to apply and/or live with the NED
- The differences in lifestyle causes tension within the communities

Supporting quotes

"My first and foremost concern is safety. [There are some drug users in my building]...My fear is what happens when their money runs out, what happens then?"

- Marian, BHA Elderly Resident

"Disabled people have common needs and [if they had separate housing] could have common resources to share."

- Boston area public official for disabled issues

"The mix of elderly and disabled creates environments that alarm elders and prevent the a cohesive living community."

- Boston area elderly advocate

Seniors need more help with the application process

Comments

Supporting quotes

Seniors are not obtaining the help they need to fill out the application

- Application support is available from advocates at shelters, but seniors disproportionately avoid shelters
- Most applications are only in English and 20% of Boston's elderly population know little to no English

"Many elderly people hang up on us when we mention shelters."

- Boston area public official for elderly issues

This creates a barrier to the application process

- The already "overwhelming and discouraging" process is magnified for the elderly population
- The long wait is a barrier to apply for the senior population

A lot of seniors don't apply to the BHA. They feel hopeless, saying "by the time they get to my name, I will be dead."

- Boston area public official for elderly issues

This makes them comparatively worse housing applicants

- While NED face "threshold" issues for basic requirements (eg. accessibility), the elderly lack an understanding and awareness of the application process
- The NED also have a better grasp of preference points

"I applied on my own. The application was pretty straight forward. I think anyone in the disabled population who needs it, knows about it and applies for it."

- William, BHA NED Resident